2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

# CHAPTER I

## FIRST YEARS

IT is fortunate for the young Burman that on his first appearance in the world all attention is directed to the mother, and the "little stranger" is left very much to himself till he has attained a stronger vitality. Were it not so, the rival parties of the Dietists and Druggists might quarrel over the relative quantities of the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, composing the new arrival, and diet and dose him out of existence immediately, in a heroic attempt to attain an equilibrium of forces. The mother indeed is the major point of interest in all countries, but childbirth nowhere entails such penalties as in Burma. Directly the child is born, the mother is rubbed all over with na-nwin (turmeric), and a big fire is lighted as near as the construction of the wooden or bamboo house permits, while rugs and blankets are heaped over her to the extent of the possessions of the family. As speedily as possible the midwife prepares a draught called se sein (green medicine), the composition of which is a tradition with the Wun-swès, and is kept a secret from inquisitive males. This the victim in bed has to drink perpetually during seven days, and for the same period, irrespective of the blankets and the time of year, is heated up with ôk pu. These are big circular or lozenge-shaped bricks. They are heated blazing hot in the wood fire, dropped for a few seconds into a pot full of water, and then wrapped up in cloths and applied to the body of the mother. In addition to this, doses of turmeric are regularly administered, and every now and then

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2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4



846 757 she is made to smell samôn-net, a plant (the *Nigella sativa*), which is put in an earthen pot, strongly heated, and then triturated into the shape of a ball. The odour is not exactly such as one would recognise as calculated to exhilarate any one, but probably after the hot bricks and the se sein everything else comes as a matter of detail. All this is done to drive out the noxious humours which are supposed to be generated by the birth of a child. On the seventh day the woman takes an elementary kind of Turkish bath. She sits over a large jar of boiling water, medicated with tamarind twigs and a few other kinds of leaves and grasses, with a blanket over her. After about an hour of this she has a cold bath, and is then free to do as she pleases. She usually goes to bed.

165 846 177·84 184 It might be supposed that under this treatment death in child-bearing would be very frequent, but as far as imperfect statistics can show the percentage is not much higher than in other countries. The result, however, appears in another way. A woman ages up ten or fifteen years for every child she has. It is satisfactory to notice that in all the larger towns in Lower Burma the more unpleasant features are fading away before the example and influence of women of other nationalities. In the jungle and in Upper Burma, however, ancient use and wont still prevail, and the young mother of fourteen or fifteen is shrivelled into thirty with her first baby.

845 If a woman gives birth to a still-born child, a piece of iron is placed in the cloth in which the body is wrapped, or in the coffin if there is one, and at the burial some member of the family says some such formula as "Never more return into thy mother's womb till this metal becomes soft as down."

[775] If a married woman dies before bearing a child (alôn hnin the-thi), a Cæsarean operation is performed, and the alôn is buried in some secret place. The reason alleged for this is, that were it not done, the husband in future existences would marry this woman again, and she would die in the same way. 845 754 Were the embryo not secretly buried it would be disinterred by hmaw-sayās, necromancers, and wizards, who would make evil uses of it. Children's cauls are as highly thought of by Burmans as they are by English

606 Since the son-in-law has the social status of a son in his wife's family, he has the right to expect his father-in-law to sponsor his career, even more than he expects this of his own father.

A daughter-in-law is expected to regard and treat her husband's father very much as her own father.

603 Grandparent and Grandchild. Because of the great difference in age between these generations, great respect is theoretically due grandparents. In practice, this may be flouted and great indulgence shown to grandchildren. Grandparents quite frequently help in rearing their grandchildren, tell them stories and teach them the Buddhist precepts.

The Life Cycle of the Individual

843 828 Birth and Infancy. When a woman is pregnant her dreams are considered to be especially significant. She is expected to remember those dreams that concern what her child will be like. The welfare of the child is forecast by some dreams. A dream of only one of things that normally come in pairs, such as earrings, bodes ill, possibly death, of the child in infancy. If the woman dreams of her viscera coming out it is indicative of a great future for the child. Persistent dreams of a particular deceased individual are indicative that the child will represent his reincarnation. In all forebodings of ill the normal counter-measure is to consult a Buddhist monk or an astrologer, who may give the woman an inscribed prayer (mantra) to keep or some amulet for the child to wear as protection.

843 Although village women need not avoid any specific foods during pregnancy, strong spices are regarded as harmful.

No supernatural means are employed to influence the sex of the prospective offspring. Certain signs are considered prognosticative. If the pregnant woman's stomach appears pointed, a boy will be born; a flat, broad stomach indicates that a girl is in prospect.

Pregnancy is considered a time of great happiness; the woman is greatly indulged and pampered by all concerned.

844 When the time for delivery approaches, any other pregnant women in the household must depart, lest their presence impede labor. Normally the woman's mother, grandmother, or aunt, in addition to a midwife, assists at birth. A fire is prepared in the room in which delivery is to take place and is maintained for ten days.

844 846 As soon as delivery has occurred, the umbilical cord is cut with a bamboo knife. The afterbirth is wrapped in the mother's skirt and is buried at once in the cardinal direction associated with the day of the week of the baby's birth. The mother is fed an infusion of turmeric, and turmeric paste is rubbed all over her body. She is kept close to the fire and made very warm. For three days she is carefully watched to prevent her from sleeping heavily during daylight hours.

846 The mother is treated as a delicate invalid for about one month and, in some cases, for as long as three months. She is fed only white rice and dried fish. A soup of garlic and banana stems is drunk to promote the flow

of milk. She is not permitted to read, sew, or to do anything that will 'arouse or stir the blood.' 846

Omens are read from the position of mongoloid spots on the newborn baby's body. They are said to represent marks put on in a previous existence and their presence proves that the child was then a human being. A blue spot on the foot presages a life of travel. Any marks leading from the right shoulder to the left hip, the line that the royal riband takes, traditionally indicated a royal future; today, however, in the absence of royalty in Burma, such marks merely forecast a 'great' future for the child. 787 845

A child is constantly watched from the time of birth for signs of whose reincarnation it represents. This is a constant topic in the family conversations. 775

Any disfigurement in a newborn child is regarded as a carry-over of the parents' store of demerit, as well as the child's, from earlier existences. It is regarded with a sense of shame and sorrow.

Although multiple births are neither preferred nor desired, they are not looked upon with any marked anxiety nor are there any supernatural means employed to prevent them. 854 751

A number of things are done by parents to protect the newborn baby from malevolent influences. Before it is a month old, a tiger bone should be ground on a stone, together with a little water, and mixed with honey. This is fed to the child to ward off a mysterious infant illness associated with the tiger. A connection is believed to exist between the tiger and convulsions; some parents place a tiger skin under the mattress of the baby's bed to guard against such illness. A knife similarly placed is said to protect against illness in general.

To insure good health and well-being for the child, a white thread over which certain prayers have been recited may be given by a Buddhist monk and tied around the baby's wrists. People should refrain from making admiring remarks about a baby's growth; if they do so, the thread may be left on the baby's wrists to neutralize the harm that may come.

When the stump of the child's umbilical cord has dried and fallen off, it is kept and used as a medicine for any illness that befalls the child. A little of it is ground up and mixed with water for such purposes. [846]

A very close connection is believed to exist between mother and child during the nursing period. Certain observances are necessary. The mother must not eat tomatoes at this time, for they may appear in the baby's stools; for the same reason, she must abstain from green vegetables. Any falling out of her hair during the nursing stage is said to be caused by bubbles blown into her by the suckling baby. To prevent the milk supply from drying up, the nursing mother avoids fruits of astringent quality, such as pomegranates and buds of the banyan. She must also take care not to allow milk to fall on the floor and dry. 853

The baby is weaned very gradually, beginning at the age of about nine months to a year in most cases, although some children may be given the breat occasionally up to the age of two or three years. Weaning is facilitated by the mother's application of a bitter substance to her breasts. 862

Normal and Preventative Measures.

Childbirth; MEE-BNA (Fire-Birth). U Myaing gives a short description of the handling of childbirth: 844

> "In the process of birth, the umbilical cord is severed with a flat bamboo. The midwife then washes the baby, wraps it up in cloth and puts it to sleep. After delivery saffron is mixed with water and given to the mother to drink. It is also smeared on the mother's body. After one week she is given hot baths once a day for three days in succession, 'to bring out the sweat'. There are no costs for delivery. Midwives do it free of charge. However, the family is obliged to give them presents of Kingyis, clothes, etc., but never money. Furthermore, it is perfectly all right even if no presents are made."

Ma Aye Myaing gives a more complete description of the entire course of pregnancy and labour, followed by the initial treatment of the new-born infant: 843 844 846

> "During the first four months of pregnancy, the expectant mother experiences occasional spells of dizziness and palpitation, and after a while begins to vomit once a day early in the morning until the time for labour. Two days before the onset of labour, pain begins to be felt in the abdomen and in the back. A mixture of saffron and water was taken internally three times a day and hot brick was applied twice a day for one week. The cost of saffron for one month is Rs. 3/-. The patient is made to perspire by boiling herbs known as "Thanat-ywet" and 'Sin-kho-ywet' in a pot and placing the pot in a covered place where the patient had to sit and perspire. The midwife visited her for seven days and applied massage to the abdomen. The umbilical cord was cut by the midwife. In cutting the cord, a silver coin was placed underneath and the cord was tied by a string. The navel cord dropped after three days. During the first week after labour, a mixture of "Yin-pya" and saffron also had to be taken to prevent haemorrhage. The infant was fed after three days, when the milk appeared. On the third day after labour, "saffron smoking" was given, and if the patient felt sleepy she had to smell "sa-mon-net". This day is known as "Thwe-thit-laung-de-ne" and is regarded as an important day. Great care is taken, as it is believed that any shock or excitment is fatal. The patient is not allowed to oversleep in the daytime. That is the reason why "sa-mon-net" is given."

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Ma Aye Myaing also reported an abortion on the third month of pregnancy at Kyaunggon on their way to Rangoon. This was due to the rigors of the evacuation. No treatment was taken.

Menstruation; YAR THI LAR. (Season-coming). Menstruation for Ma Aye Myaing started at the age of fifteen years, then disappeared for seven months, after which it appeared again and has occured regularly since. For this, she takes a mixture of jaggery and ginger. Jaggery for one day costs one anna and ginger costs .33 annas. The black longyi worn at this time absorbs the discharge and does not show the stain. The upper classes in towns now use western pads in public, but black longyis are still in use in private. 841 [117]

23: Brant & Mi Mi Khaing E, I-5 (1949-1950)1951
AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4



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## THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
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12. BABY'S BATH.

## CHAPTER II

### *CHILDHOOD*

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13. THE RATTAN CRADLE (PAKET).

THE cradle and the flower-stand are the two things that strike one in every Burman dwelling by the care bestowed on them. The plainest cradle has a turned rail and a carved headpiece (p. 8). The cradle swings by ropes to which the mosquito curtain is tied. The bed is made of a cotton mattress and a few plies of cloth. The infant is swaddled while its mother is lying in, and for a week or two later according to the season of the year. After that it wears only necklets and bangles. The first clothes the child gets are for grand occasions, after it has learned to run about and take care of itself. When the mother has recovered, she takes her babe with her wherever she goes, and if a wood or cane cradle is not handy she slings the infant in a plain hammock of cloth (No. 284). The Burmans do not carry their young children in a sling on the back like the hill people, but on the hip as soon as they can sit up (Nos. 327, 424).

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When the babe is hardy enough to go without covering, it spends its waking hours on a smooth mat spread over a springy bamboo floor which somewhat